



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## NEWS RELEASE

DIVISION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

1820 E. 17th St. • Suite 115 • Idaho Falls, Idaho 83404

(208) 523-0855 • FAX (208) 522-4515

Contact: Scott Bragonier, (208) 523-0855

October 4, 2002

### GRIZZLY BEARS FOUND DEAD IN NORTHEASTERN IDAHO

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) law enforcement agents are investigating the illegal killing of a sow grizzly bear and her yearling female cub. The two bears were found dead last week by a bowhunter in the Rock Creek drainage on Sawtelle Peak near Henry's Lake. A preliminary examination indicates that the animals had been shot with a firearm. Unlike other recent incidents involving human-bear encounters, the bears did not appear to have been killed in self-defense. Both bears will be sent to the Service's National Forensics Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon for forensic analysis.

The grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos*) is listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and is protected from illegal take. Service Special Agent Scott Bragonier noted that, "The killing of a threatened or endangered species is a crime punishable by law. A person convicted of this crime may be imprisoned for up to one year and be fined as high as \$100,000 for each offense."

According to Chuck Schwartz, leader of the USGS Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team, the 7-year-old female bear, F364, was a valuable research animal. Her activity has been tracked since she was collared in the fall of 1999. Collar monitoring these past few years has indicated that the 300-pound female routinely traveled between Yellowstone National Park and the Sawtelle Peak area in Idaho. The sow had given birth to two cubs in the spring of 2001, but lost one of the cubs that same summer. The yearling cub found dead near her mother was the sow's first successful attempt at raising offspring. Schwartz stated, "The loss of these two bears is a definite setback for Idaho's grizzly bear recovery. Not only was this bear valuable because she had reached reproductive maturity, but she was passing knowledge to her female offspring. Few reproductive females have been found in the last two decades in the Idaho portion of the Yellowstone Recovery Zone." The sow and her cub had never been involved in human encounters.

Special Agent Bragonier is asking for help with the case. He said, "The person or persons responsible for this egregious act must be held accountable. We encourage anyone who may have information about the illegal bear killings, or anyone who may have observed suspicious behavior in the area of the crime or may have overheard conversations regarding the incident, to please contact our law enforcement division immediately, or call the *Citizens Against Poaching* hotline at 1-800-632-5999."

For further information, please contact Special Agent Scott Bragonier at (208) 523-0855 or contact the law enforcement central office at (208) 378-5333.

— FWS —

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses nearly 540 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas.

It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

